

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is one of oldest forms of human development.

- Archeologists and anthropologists have found evidence in Stone Age cultures of talented artisans who instructed younger people to perpetuate their skills.
- In *The Odyssey*, when King Odysseus went off to fight the Trojan War, he left Telemachus, his son and only heir, with a trusted friend to teach him how to be a good leader. That wise and sensitive man's name was Mentor.

Definitions:

“Anyone who has a beneficial life- or style-altering effect on another person, generally as a result of personal one-on-one contact; one who offers knowledge, insight, perspective, or wisdom that is helpful to another person in a relationship which goes beyond duty and obligation.” Gordon Shea

“A mentor is simply someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone. Mentors are learning coaches-sensitive, trusted advisors.”

Chip Bell

USDA Mentoring Program Overview

Program Objectives

The following objectives of the USDA Mentoring Program may be summarized into three key categories. Each objective addresses either career development, diversity, and/or improving morale.

- Promote diversity within the Department to assist mission areas in meeting their goals of improving employment and advancement opportunities for all employees.
- To support cultural changes that are occurring with the implementation of new programs and other major changes within the Department.
- Assist employees in becoming more knowledgeable and better equipped to advance within the Department or within their mission area.
- Improve present job skills and abilities of employees in managerial, supervisory, and non-supervisory positions.
- Improve morale of all participants by providing satisfying experiences through participation in the program.
- Support career enhancement by providing employees with resources, guidance, and networking.
- Support the orientation of new employees.
- Improve communication among our diverse work force at different grade levels and in different mission areas within the Department.

Ground Rules

- Both parties must keep all information discussed in the sessions confidential, within Agency ethical parameters and legal restrictions.

- No matches will be made within the pair's supervisor/manager chain of command
- Every attempt will be made to rematch the mentee, if he/she applies for a job within the mentor's chain of command during the program
- Up to 5 hours/month
- No restrictions on informal mentoring. Participants are urged to frequently "check in" with each other via informal phone calls or e-mails. It's a good idea to schedule informal activities to assure regular contact.

Cost of the Program

The first class will be a pilot project. The USDA Diversity Council has prepaid for all of the participants in the pilot project, excluding travel cost. Following the pilot project, agencies will have to pay a fee, plus travel cost for the mentees. Mentors will receive instruction free of charge (travel cost must be borne by the agency)

Program Length

The program is designed to last on a formal basis for a period of one year. Each participating mentee and mentor must agree to work together for one year. The program does make provision for rematching in the event that a mentor/mentee relationship is unworkable.

Time Requirement

A reasonable amount of **official time** (up to 5 hours per month) will be allowed for mentoring relationships. Supervisory approval will be required to participate in the program. At the discretion of the mentee and mentor, other sessions may be scheduled on their own time. Each mentoring relationship will vary according to needs and interests.

The Matching System

The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) will propose tentative matches of mentors and mentees. A system has been incorporated in the program in the event that an initial match or ongoing relationship is not satisfactory. The mentor and mentee may turn to OHRM for guidance and assistance. Unsatisfactory mentoring relationships may be terminated at any time during the one-year period by contacting OHRM. An attempt will be made to match the mentee with another mentor, although normally, rematching will only be undertaken during the first six months of the program.

Mentee/Mentor Agreement

The first activity that each mentee/mentor pair will work on together is the development of a set of measurable goals that can be completed during the program year. The mentee and mentor will incorporate the goals into a short written agreement that each will commit to and sign. The Agreement format will be provided by the OHRM.

Application Procedures

Submitting an Application

Interested candidates should review the information provided in this brochure and then take the following steps:

1. Obtain a copy of the Application Package.
2. Complete the appropriate application form (mentee or mentor).
3. Complete a supervisor form and obtain the supervisor's signature on the form.
4. Submit application forms to the following address:

United States Department of Agriculture**Mentoring Program****Attention: Nancy Robinson****Program Manager****OHRM, WPEDD****Room 313 W****Jamie L. Whitten Bldg.****1400 Independence Ave., SW****Washington, DC 20250**